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have been men who have had the gift, well may we call it genius, of expressing the minds of their associates so faithfully, and with such simplicity and spontaneity that the people will take it to themselves for all time.

We cannot tell what songs of our day will be the folk songs of tomorrow. It may be that "rag-time" is *of us*. Then it will be incorporated in the American folk music of the future. But the public taste is too fickle for us to pass judgment on anything it fancies today. If a melody would retain its appeal from generation to generation its merit must be great.

Such is folk music, the music of a people which so expresses their feelings, their hopes, their joys and their sorrows as to become a vital part of their existence. Of false sentiment there must be none. Of merely transitory pleasure there can be no hint, for the joy of a folk song must be the happiness of a people, a happiness that has stood the test of years. Regardless of its origin, whether it be the aristocrat from the pen of a musical intellectual, or whether it be the mongrel offspring of the people themselves, to be a folk song a melody must be *of the people*.

## Two Dramatists of the Mediæval

BY RICHARDSON WRIGHT

**N**O two dramatists would seem to be farther apart than Gabrielle D'Annunzio and Paul Claudel. The one serves quietly and with distinction, borne of long consular experience, as Minister Plenipotentiary of France to Brazil; the other has managed, by dint of valor, patriotic frenzy and military madness, to keep his name before the public these many months. No two lives, no two spiritual experiences or expressions could be more divergent. Yet, reading the one in the light of the other affords an illuminating contrast to those interested in the poetic drama and, incidentally, gives a fairly comprehensive view of mediævalism as expressed by two modern playwrights.

As dramatists neither D'Annunzio nor Claudel can be said to have met with great success. Neither of them has a sense of the theatre. Action, which is the *sine qua non* of modern dramatic conquest, is singularly lacking in the works of both men. Such action as their dramas require is hidden in the stage directions one does not gather it from the dialogue. Moreover, their dramas are poetical; and finally, they center their

interest in the Renaissance or other gorgeous and tragic periods of the vague past which call for more than casual acquaintance to appreciate. Despite these seeming limitations, their contributions to dramatic wealth are very great.

The backgrounds and development of the two men furnish a strange contrast. At an early age Claudel fell under the spell of Mallarmé, and consequently his first heritage was from the Symbolists. In his prose he became the debtor to Arthur Rimbaud. He experienced a sudden and uncompromising conversion to Catholicism, which gives him foundation and amply justifies our classing him with those other French literary Catholics—Huysmans, Paul Bourget, Francis Jammes, and Maurice Barres. There were later influences—as witness the Nietzschean will-to-power in *Tête d'Or* and the Greek touch (Claudel made an excellent translation of Agamemnon) in his Aeschylean types of women—but he still maintained an unflagging zeal for the faith. Claudel's approach to mediævalism is through the logical avenue of this faith. Today a man in his prime—he is only fifty-two—he has to his credit seven

poetic dramas, several one act plays, several volumes of philosophical, religious and patriotic verse, a book of Far East impressions, and French versions of Agamemnon and Conventry Patmore.

D'Annunzio presents quite a different picture. Born a Hungarian Jew (his real name is said to be Rapagnetta) he was educated in Tuscany where, showing a marked talent for the arts, he became inspired by the pre-Raphael artists, Giotto especially. This gave him the foundation for his knowledge of archaeology and the crafts so conspicuous in his works, and which later, during his residence at Rome, developed into a passionate interest in pottery, wood-carving, furniture, etc. From Carducci he learned his first lessons of style; from the Italian classics he took the erudite, enormous and archaic vocabulary which makes his writings so beautiful and recondite. The Carduccian influence is seen in his early volume of verse *Primo Vere*, a book that brought him immediate fame. Taking up his residence in Rome, he wrote for the *Cronica Bizantina*, a very modern publication. This connection gave him entrée into the fashionable world and served as a door to that life of sensuousness and eroticism in which he formulated the strange philosophy that a man can only attain purification through a complete abandonment to his desires. This was the life that created the incest in *Fedra*, the adulation of adultery in *Francesca da Rimini* and the brutal lust in *La Gioconda*.

D'Annunzio also acquired a passing knowledge of the Bible, as witness his first dramatic contribution on the Parables. Likewise did he attain a mastery of the Classics—Greek especially—which is shown in the first long drama *La Città Morta*. As his books appeared year by year, he showed the successive influences of Nietzsche, Tolstoi and Dostoevsky. His supermen are super-sensualists and super-activists, devoted to the gratifying of their selfish desires, worshippers of masculine virility. *La Gloria* is a case in point. D'Annunzio

also has borrowed freely from the French—from Flaubert, Baudelaire, De Maupassant, Barres, Huysmans and Maeterlinck. He is also deeply in debt to Catholicism for the richness of ritual introduced in such later dramas as *La Nave*, *Le Martyre de Saint Sebastien* and *Parisina*.

First, last, and always, D'Annunzio is an esthete. "Artistic torture, graceful murder, lovely crime," are his stock in trade. His two talents are the beautiful and the horrible. He has no message, no humanitarian instincts, no belief. His approach to mediævalism is through its color and its lust. Contrast this with Claudel's unyielding faith, and you see two men as wide apart as the poles, looking upon the same period and seeing quite different things.

It is possible to consider D'Annunzio and Claudel as isolated figures, or, and this is more logical, one may consider them as the full flood of certain dramatic tides found simultaneously in many countries. D'Annunzio the leader of æsthetes in Italy just as Wilde was in England. When he became a Nietzschean he left off estheticism and was consumed with activity and virility. His military ardor and valor in the war, his recent conquest of Fiume are merely an attempt to act out the latest of his philosophies. For D'Annunzio is not a static person, although the past glory of Italy, which he depicts so beautifully in the majority of his dramas, is the urge that impels him to recreate it now in this dream of Italian conquest. The tide of Æstheticism ebbed. The beauty and lust of the Renaissance (some poet has called it "the regrettable Renaissance") lost their hold on him. To Claudel, on the other hand, the faith of the Renaissance is an abiding and unchanging element, and he has gone on, through various influences, interpreting it in all the rich imagery with which that period and that faith abound.

Therein lies Claudel's place as part of a movement felt in various countries where intellectuals are quick to discern

the tides that move customs and philosophies.

Claudél was not accorded immediate appreciation. His absence from Paris on consular duty in the United States, Germany, Bohemia and the Far East prevented his mingling with men of letters in France. Moreover, his message—and surely his dramas have a message apart from their beauty—was not one that the times could accept quickly. For the essence of faith is discipline and sacrifice and, until the war forced them on us, discipline and sacrifice were assiduously avoided. But at this time Claudél reads like a new philosophy. He outgrew the adolescent morbidity of *Tête d'Or*. His richness of color is not Byzantine as is some of D'Annunzio's; it is of the West. It is localized, and it presents problems current today. *L'Otage* represents the Papacy as the rock of strength in the chaos of the world. *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, is a mediæval mystery showing how a mediæval saint was made—a very modern sort of saint, however. *Le Repos du Septième Jour* is a revelation of God. Even in *La Ville*, a metaphysical dialogue in which scientific materialism and profane love are overcome by the poet-priest, the element of faith is evident. This last is a youthful attempt—written at twenty-nine—and has the marks of naiveté. And yet much of that same naiveté can be found through all of Claudél's plays and poems. *Cinq Grands Odes* written three years later, 1900, is an ultimatum on the power of poetry. For Claudél is first and last the poet, the philosophical poet. The æstheticism so evident in his imagery and

gigantic scenes is always the æstheticism of religion.

In a word then, we see D'Annunzio presenting the worship of beauty, Claudél presenting the beauty of worship. Of the one the world has wearied, for it became decadent and foul; to the other the world must return if it is to find a way out. That is why the laggard appreciation of Claudél will undoubtedly end in a more popular understanding and success.

There is another reason why Claudél commands attention. He is not alone the dramatist of Renaissance faith, he is a very modern of the modernists in verse form. In this he is an isolated figure. His dramas are written in neither *vers libre* nor poetic prose, but most certainly the style is founded on the strictest sort of rules. His characters do not speak their lines, they chant them, and the lines are written to accommodate this enunciation.

A final sign of promise lies in the fact that Claudél is a mystic—but he is a very practical sort of mystic—and the world is turning today to that type of man for guidance. *L'Annonce faite à Marie* is sheer mysticism and so are many passages in *L'Otage*. Vast tides from outside this flesh and world move his characters. Almost Greek, one would say; but still entirely Christian. In D'Annunzio we also find esoteric emotion—clouded, vague, sensuous, heavy. Claudél's emotions are just as heavy and impelling, but they are made crystal clear by faith. Such clouds as surround them are the sort that we read separated the ascending Master from the evangelists' gaze.

